

The Rise and Demise of Floyd

by Mike Evans

At the close of the 1983-84 academic year, a dark horse emerged out of complete obscurity to challenge incumbent SU executive member Andrew Watts for the presidency of the U of A Students' Union. The dark horse was Floyd Hodgins. Hodgins has since firmly established himself as the most colorful and probably best known campus personality of the last decade.

Hodgins campaigned that year as the only logical alternative to the "political hacks" that seem to be drawn to the second floor of SUB like mindless zombies to the island of Haiti.

His opponent, Andrew Watts, had been a member of the Greenhill executive, an executive that garnered considerable animosity from the student body when they voted themselves a thirty three percent wage increase. That, coupled with the fact that it was revealed Watts had only managed to complete 10 courses in four years of attendance at the U of A, signalled Watts' death-knell and Hodgins' triumphant rise from anonymity.

However, in the Gateway presidential debates published that year, Hodgins revealed for the first time the kind of attitude he brought to bear on student politics and the territory he was going to stake out for himself.

When questioned about lobbying techniques to ensure adequate government funding, Watts suggested that large scale demonstrations were no longer effective and that petitioning members of the government on a more personal level was generally more effective. Hodgins countered Watts' claim by citing student activism of the 1960's and suggesting that "In the sixties they (the government) were always responding."

Hodgins resembles a throwback to the era of the flower children in more than his attitude toward student politics. He is a slight man, with unruly black hair and a long, generally unkempt black beard. He is quite shy in public though his writing in *The Grind* makes that hard to believe. He is soft-spoken and not particularly fond of conflict when confronted face to face. In fact, he stated during his campaign that his greatest obstacle was overcoming his fear of public speaking.

However, Hodgins managed to capture the imagination of the voters in that particular SU campaign and when the smoke had cleared, he had captured 68 percent of the popular vote, the largest margin of victory since 1971. However, voter turnout in 1984 was the smallest in years and Watts was a universally hated presidential hopeful. Hodgins, to the surprise of politically conscious students at the U

of A and himself, was the new president of the Students' Union.

Hodgins wasted no time in establishing a high profile on campus after taking office.

His first conflict came in the selection of the Academic Commissioner for the 84-85 academic year, Anne McGrath. Opposed to her selection, Hodgins coordinated a drive to have her selection overturned and a new candidate placed in the portfolio. McGrath contended the reason for Hodgins' opposition was his distaste for her politics. McGrath is a member of the Communist party of Canada. Their feelings for one another became so intense that McGrath called Hodgins a "fucking liar" in the SU offices, and Hodgins subsequently requested an investigation of that incident by DIE (Discipline, Interpretation and Enforcement) board which could have culminated in McGrath's dismissal from school.

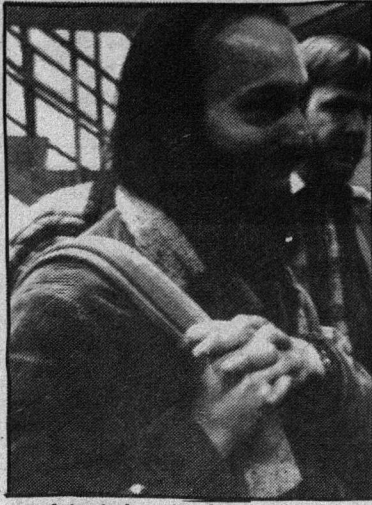
When asked why she called Hodgins a "fucking liar", McGrath replied: "because he is." McGrath ultimately failed in her attempt to remain Academic Commissioner and was replaced by Kerri Kamra.

Hodgins found himself in a trench opposing *The Gateway* over the no-man's land of student politics several times in the following year. He actively sought the dismissal of Gateway editor-in-chief Gilbert Bouchard and frequently claimed that *The Gateway's* coverage of student politics and SU activities that year was biased and unfair. He believed that *The Gateway* consistently misrepresented him and deliberately set itself in opposition to him. Bouchard said, "I don't think he ever really grasped his role as SU president."

Hodgins' discontent with *The Gateway* was, to a large degree, responsible for the appearance of the U of A's alternative paper, *The Grind*. Hodgins was heavily involved in the founding of the paper. He ran a weekly column in *The Grind* entitled "The President Speaks", in order to make public his views on campus events which he felt were being neglected by *The Gateway*. Bouchard maintains that Hodgins' involvement with *The Grind*, taking into account Hodgins' well-known feuds with *The Gateway*, constituted a conflict of interest, but the matter was never pursued.

Hodgins, however, did not begin to truly come into his own until taking over as editor-in-chief of *The Grind* from Michael Hunter following *The Grind's* inaugural year. Hodgins now had a vehicle to make his opinions on campus events publicly available in a way that was denied to him as president, despite his column.

Though *The Grind* has consist-



Hodgins in happier days

ently been attacked for being a mindless, sexist, racist, prejudiced publication, it has received the most publicity regarding its coverage of the sexual harassment issue on campus.

Hodgins broke the story of alleged professorial misconduct in the department of Educational Psychology in a summer edition of *The Grind*. Though the story was subsequently picked up by *The Edmonton Journal*, *The Sun* and *The Alberta Report*, Hodgins' own efforts were deemed defamatory and libelous by one of the professors named in the article, Dr. Paul Koziey.

The story written by Hodgins was largely innuendo and suggestion. Hodgins himself wrote that *The Grind* had volumes of "hearsay which we would love to substantiate". Koziey threatened to pursue legal action against Hodgins, *The Grind*, and the Students' Union. In order to placate Dr. Koziey, *The Grind* was required to print an apology and retraction regarding the article in question which was also required to appear in *The Gateway*.

The attendant publicity and threat of legal action was deemed dangerous to the current SU Executive and in an August meeting of the Building Services Board - the administrative body responsible for all clubs on campus - a directive was handed down which required *The Grind* to alter their constitution in such a way as to make them function in a more responsible journalistic fashion, and to have the alterations passed at a meeting of the general membership.

Hodgins gave a new constitution to Clubs Commissioner, Barb Higgin in September which he claimed addressed the concerns of the BSB. When questioned further about the amendments contained in the new constitution, Hodgins claimed they were accepted at a general meeting of the paper held on May 17, 1985.

Hodgins later claimed that the amendments themselves were not

passed by the general membership, but that the concepts contained in the new constitution were.

When Higgin went to *The Grind* offices for documentation of the meeting, she could find no agenda or minutes to prove that it ever occurred. When questioned, neither Dale Moore nor Rick Stedman (editorial staff of *The Grind*) could verify the meeting had in fact taken place, as neither was involved with *The Grind* at that time.

Scott Richardson, VP Internal under whose jurisdiction clubs fall, determined that whether or not the new constitution was passed by a meeting of the general membership in May was irrelevant. *The Grind* did not receive the request of the BSB until August and so the new constitution had to be ratified by a meeting of the general membership after that request.

It should be mentioned that the BSB request is not unusual nor discriminatory. As a club, *The Grind* is required to re-register every September in order to be allotted office space, funding and other assistance from the SU, and part of that registration includes submitting a constitution.

Hodgins found the request of the BSB objectionable and appears to have tried to ignore the request, citing the aforementioned approved new constitution. Confidential sources have suggested the reason Hodgins tried to avoid a general meeting is that his own leadership of *The Grind* was under question and that a general meeting could have resulted in his removal. Moore and Stedman replied to this suggestion with a unanimous "That's bullshit".

Stedman elaborated with "More ouzo and bring on the dancing girls". The issue exploded in the Students' Council meeting of Oct. 29 when Jayson Woodbridge put forward a motion to put *The Grind* on probation until a new constitution was submitted to Commissioner Higgin. *The Grind* was given until Nov. 12 to ratify a new constitution at which time, if no action had been taken, their club status would be suspended.

Rather than - in his view - submit to the prejudicial pressure of the

current Executive and Council, Hodgins stepped down as editor-in-chief of *The Grind* and suggested that the tactics employed by Woodbridge and unnamed members of the SU Executive were not unlike those used by Nazi Germany and tinpot dictators of the Third World.

It should be mentioned that when the original cause of conflict appeared, that of Hodgins' article on sexual harassment, Hodgins used the old *Grind* constitution, not even the one he claims was passed in May, to defend his actions. The May 14 constitution is, in fact, a fabrication. This belief was instrumental in Council's decision to put *The Grind* on probation.

Hodgins has found himself in the unenviable position of being one of the most vilified students on campus.

SU president Mike Nickel says, "A great degree of problems with *The Grind* are not that the students or the administration are anti-*Grind*, but are anti-Floyd, due to his abrasive confrontational political style."

A comment made by councillor Ken Bosman, not related to this case, is still strangely appropriate: Friends may come and go, but enemies accumulate.

Hodgins' term in office as SU president was characterized by petty disputes with the administration, *The Gateway* and even members of his own executive. Since moving to *The Grind* he has managed to recruit even greater opposition, in the form of members of the current executive and students' council and the student body at large.

Though he appears to have the support of *The Grind* staff and other students on campus, the dark horse who rode from obscurity to victory is now, quite likely, mortally wounded.

There is considerable speculation that Hodgins intends to run for the presidency of the SU again this year. Perhaps his career as a public figure is not quite over at the UofA, but it is unlikely he will ever again soar at the heights he is accustomed to. Unfortunately for his ambition, Hodgins, the hippie hero, has become, instead, good copy.

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